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Gaudapada and Vasistha

A comparative survey of their philosophy

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Gauḍapāda, the author of the famous *Kārikās* on the *Māndūkyo-paniśād*, is quite well-known to the world of Indian Philosophy. He is considered by the Oriental scholars to be the first exponent of the Advaita Vedānta after the *Upaniśads*. This view stands unchallenged only so long as the work known as the *Yoga-Vāsiśtha* has not been studied, and its date definitely determined. It is really strange why Oriental scholars have not yet turned their attention to this important work which when studied thoroughly will perhaps be found not to be a post-Śankara work, as it is generally believed to be. In the *Yoga-Vāsiśtha* we find almost every view held by Gauḍapāda, and there can be found lines in the *Yoga-Vāsiśtha* parallel to almost every line of the II, III, and IV chapters of the *Kārikās* which represent the philosophical position of Gauḍapāda, yet it is strange that there is hardly any line, except one or two borrowed perhaps from some common source too well-known at that time, which is literally identical in the two. Leaving the question which work is the earlier of the two to the historians, we shall here attempt a brief survey of the opinions shared equally by both Gauḍapāda and Vasiśtha, the philosopher in the *Yoga-Vāsiśtha*, under four main heads, namely, *Idealism* (*Kalpanā-vāda*), *Illusionism* (*Māyā-vāda*), *Acosmism* (*Ajāta-vāda*), and the *Method of Self-realisation* (*Yoga*).

1. Idealism (*Kalpanā-vāda*).

It has been sometimes maintained by the students of Hindu philosophy that "Hindu thinkers have been and are (in the epistemological sense) not only Realists but Realists of a thorough-going type. There is no trace of Subjectivism which may be found in the Buddhist schools".

Now whatever might be said of other Hindu thinkers including perhaps Śankara also, Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha at any rate were thorough-going, Idealists. Both of them hold that the reality of the world-experience consists in its being imagined by mind. Here is what Gauḍapāda says : "The external as well as the internal objects are all imagined (K. II. 14). Those objects that are in the subtle condition within as well as those that are manifest without, are all the work of imagination, the difference between them lying only in the means of their cognition (K. II. 15). The whole experience consisting of perceiver and perceived is merely imagination of mind (K. IV. 72). The whole duality, of whatever kind, is merely a phenomenon of mind (K. III. 31). As movement makes a fire-brand appear straight, crooked, etc., so activity makes thought appear as perceiver and perceived (K. IV. 47). As are dreams, magical creations and castles-in-the-air, so declare the scholars of the *Upaniṣads*, this cosmos to be (K. II. 31). All entities are like dream-objects sent forth by creative power of the Self (K. II. 5).

In the same way declares Vasiṣṭha:—

"Everything in the world-experience is the work of imagination only (YV. VIb. 2 10. 11). All this world-experience is a wonderful working out of consciousness in itself like the rising and falling of the city of dream (YV. VIb. 42. 16). All the three worlds are the creation of the activity of mind alone (YV. IV. 11. 13). This universe is considered to be the overflow of mind (YV. IV. 47. 48). Everything is constructed by the imagination of the self as in dream (YV. III. 10. 35). The world-experience comes out the heart of consciousness as a tree comes out of a seed (YV. VIb. 51, 8). The world-experience is like a castle-in-the air (YV. VIa. 33, 45). "And so on,

Do they give reasons like Berkeley for holding this startling position in philosophy ? Yes they do give some, though not in a systematic way. Gauḍapāda is very brief in his statements. His arguments for Idealism may be gathered from the following : "(i) A thing is said to be real because it is experienced and on account of its being the cause of an action. But are the objects of our illusory knowledge which are mere ideas of the mind not such ? There is no difference between the two in these respects. Therefore the so-called real things are also thought-creations as the illusory ones are (K. IV. 44). (ii) We all know that mind assumes a duality of the objects and the subject in dream by its own power, so there is no reason why in the waking experience we should not think that it acts in the same manner through the same cause (K. III. 30). (iii) The duality (of the perceiver and the perceived) is a work of the mind because when the mind is annihilated, i. e., expanded into the Infinite Self (as in the case of Samādhi) the duality is not at all experienced (K. III. 31),

The arguments of Vasiṣṭha for Idealism may be gathered as the following :—

"(i) The phenomenon of knowledge cannot be explained if the subject and object are two things quite different and opposed in their nature, for no relation can exist between two heterogeneous things (YV. III. 121. 37, 42). That which comes into consciousness cannot but be a mode of consciousness for nothing of a different nature could have entered consciousness (YV. VIb. 25. 12). If the object were something of a different nature from the knowing mind, it will ever remain unknown, and there would then be no proof even of its existence (YV. VIb. 25. 15). (ii) The whole world-experience, with its cities and mountains, etc., can be duplicated in dreams. We all know that the dream objects are only modes of consciousness. There is no reason why the objects of the waking experience should not be taken to be so. (iii) The world-experience and its objects do not exist for the consciousness of the Yogi (who has learnt to put a stop to the activity of his mind) (YV. III. 60. 27). When the mind is lost in the Infinite consciousness (as in the case of Nirvāṇa) there is no experience of any duality (YV. VIa. 93. 44). All these considerations show that the mind is the nave of the wheel of the world (YV. V. 49. 40)."

But then, is there any difference between dreams and the waking experience if the latter is just like the former which, of course, we all know to be a play of ideas in our mind? Both Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha think that there is hardly any difference between the contents of the two. Thus says Gauḍapāda: "The wise regard the waking and the dream states as one because of the similarity of the objective experiences in them (K. II. 6). The mind, though one, appears dual (subject and object) in dream, so also in the waking state, it, though one, appears dual through its creative power (K. III. 30), etc." In the same way Vasiṣṭha holds that "There is no difference between waking and dream experiences except that one is more stable than the other. The contents of both are similar in entirety, always and everywhere (YV. IV. 19. 11). The waking experience is just like that of dream (YV. III. 57. 50), etc., (YV. VIb. 23, 24, 29, 42). Dream also appears as waking states so long as they last, and the waking state looks like a dream when the objects of perception are not stable and lasting (YV. IV. 20. 12). From the standpoint of the permanent Self there is absolutely no difference between the contents of dream and waking state (YV. VIb. 161. 24). Although the waking man never apprehends his waking state to be a dream, the dead man rising again to experience a new life thinks his past life to have been a dream-like existence (YV. VIb. 161. 25). As a man may recollect the many sleep-dreams he has experienced throughout his life, so the Perfect Sages can remember the waking dreams they have experienced in their long history of transmigration (YV. VIb. 161. 30)."

Now, if the world-experience is a work of imagination, who is the author of it? Gauḍapāda raises this question in I. II. 11 and answers it thus: "The Ātman, all light, imagines these objects by himself through

his own power; he alone cognises the objects so sent forth. This is the last word of the Vedānta on the subject (K. II. 12). The Lord brings about the variety of subjective experience as well as that of objective experience (K. II. 13). The first result of ideation is Jīva from which the various entities subjective and objective come forth (K. II. 16)." Thus according to Gauḍapāda, the first product of the Creative imagination in the Absolute Reality, which is Consciousness, is Jīva (a finite entity) which imagines the subjects of its experience. Vasiṣṭha calls the Subject of world-experience by many names one of which is also Jīva, but the names most often used are *Manas* and Brahma. "The world experience," Thus says Vasiṣṭha, "is spread out by Brahma manifesting himself in the form of *Manas* (YV. III. 3. 29)." How Brahma arises in the Absolute Reality is explained thus : " *Manas* comes out of the Absolute Reality like a sprout. The Creative power of the Absolute Reality (which is always inherent in it as its inseparable nature) by its own free-will, in a mere sportful overflow, comes to self-consciousness at a particular point, which in reality is forgetfulness of its being one with the whole reality, and on account of intensity there, begins to vibrate in the form of imagining activity ("consciring") and assumes a separate and distinct existence for itself apart from the Whole whose one aspect it is in reality (YV. IV. 44. 4; III. 96. 3; IV. 42. 4, 5; VIa. 114, 15, 16; VIa. 33. 30; III. 2. 56; etc; etc.,)."

Thus we see that Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha have the same Idealistic standpoint. Gauḍapāda, however, does not raise the problem, which is very important metaphysically, whether it is the individual or the Cosmic Jīva which imagines the world-experience including that of every individual. On the answer of this question will depend whether he is a Subjective or an Objective Idealist. Vasiṣṭha raises the problem and answers it in a satisfactory way reconciling the claims of both Solipsism and Realism, which does not concern us here.

II. Illusionism (Māyā vāda).

Having established the ideality or the imaginary nature of the world-experience, both Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha proceed to point out another very important feature of the objects of experience, namely, their temporary appearance in the field of consciousness. We have seen that the objects of the waking life are similar to those of dream state. But we generally regard the contents of a dream to be unreal because they do not persist for a long time, but come into consciousness for a short while and vanish. Similarly in the waking experience we regard some objects as unreal appearances when they are perceived for a short while but vanish soon from the view. But is not the experience of everything in this world of a similar nature for the eternally existent Self, before whose vision numberless objects have come and gone ? The Eternal Self has experienced the beginning and end of innumerable objects. Every object of experience has in the consciousness of was not and will not be. But can

that which is real ever cease to be ? If it is real it must ever exist. A temporary appearance cannot be said to be real. This is how both Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha argue. The real, according to Vasiṣṭha, is "that which never comes to an end (YV. III. 4. 62), and that which has a beginning and an end cannot be real in any way, for real is only that which has neither a beginning nor an end (YV. IV. 5. 9)." Gauḍapāda also repeats the same line literally in K. II. 6 and in K. IV. 31 which has been translated as "That which is naught at the beginning and is so also at the end, does necessarily not exist in the middle". "On this logic of reality the objects of experience cannot be said to be real at all (K. II. 32)." But do they not appear to be so ? So do illusions and dream-objects appear, but we all know them to be unreal. All things seen in dream, says Gauḍapāda, "are unreal, being seen within the body for in so small; space how could objects exist and be seen". So on and so forth (K. IV. 3, 34, 35, 36, 39; II. 1, 2, 3). "Objects therefore are illusory appearances though they appear to be real (K. II. 6). That they serve some purpose (and so should be regarded as real in opposition to the illusory appearances which do not serve any purpose) comes to naught in dream, hence (on the previous above mentioned principle) they are illusory appearances (K. II. 7). Even in dream we make the usual distinction of unreal, calling the subjective imagination within the dream unreal and the objectively existent things as real, as we do in the waking experience. Yet in fact both are illusory appearances (K. II. 9, 10)." So, as Vasiṣṭha says, all objects of experience should be viewed as "illusory appearances, visions of ignorance, mere *maya* (literally that which does not exist), delusions of consciousness and dream-like appearances (YV. III. 57, 54); like illusory water in a desert (YV. IV. 1.7); like an unsubstantial rainbow (YV. IV. 1. 23); like the appearance of a snake in a rope (YV. 100, 58); like an unreal city in the sky (YV. VIb. 190. 13); like a second moon in the vision of a diseased eye (YV. III. 66. 7); and like the movement of trees in the vision of an intoxicated fellow (YV. III. 8);" etc., etc.

In this connection, it will be interesting to note in the *Kārikās* as well as in the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* the connotation of the term *Māyā* which has played a very conspicuous part in the subsequent philosophy of India, and has very often been misunderstood both by the followers of *Māyāvāda* and its opponents; specially because Gauḍapāda is generally believed to be the father of *Māyāvāda* in *Vedānta*. The word *Māyā* occurs in some eight *Kārikās* of Gauḍapāda: (II. 12; III. 19; 27, 28; IV. 58, 59, 61, 69). A careful consideration of the significance of the word will bring one to the conclusion that by Gauḍapāda *Māyā* is used in the sense of a peculiar power which enables its possessor to create some forms which do not exist in the sense of the really existent, yet give the appearance of their being so, and also enables him to multiply or change himself into any number of forms, without, however, himself undergoing the slightest

modification. The products of such power were characterised as *Māyā-maya* and sometimes as *māyā* even. An illustration of such a peculiar capacity was, in old times when people did not know well the secret of the so-called magic found in the activity of a magician. Śankara very often uses this illustration to make people understand *Māyā*. But a careful study of the stories of Lavana (YV. III) and Gadhi (YV. V Book) given by Vasiṣṭha in illustration of *Māyā* will convince us that *Māyā* is not like the power of a magician so much as like that of a Hypnotist, in the best possible sense, who by his thought-power can produce, and was able to produce in ancient India, before the vision of others, or even of himself, things and scenes which do not exist in reality, but appear to exist. *Māyā* is thus, according to Vasiṣṭha, a power or capacity, of the Absolute Reality, which is Consciousness, to think out or "conscire" forms which come to exist when thus thought out or imagined (YV. VIb. 70. 18). "It is the Creative Power of the Ultimate Reality and it can imagine the world-appearance as the thought-power of an ordinary man can build his world of imagination (YV. VIb. 78. 6). It is called by the names of Prakṛti, Divine Will, Creative Force, and the World *Māyā* (YV. VIb. 85. 14)."

So there is nothing very peculiar about the word *Māyā* which has been very much misunderstood in the later philosophy of India. The reason why it has been so misunderstood is perhaps the sense of illusoriness accompanying the word. If the conception of the real and the unreal of Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha stated above that 'all that has a beginning and an end is unreal' is accepted, it will be quite clear that except Consciousness which experiences the beginning and end of all objects everything is unreal, however long it may appear in the field of consciousness. In this sense all the products of *Māyā* are unreal, for they have a beginning and an end. The activity of the Divine Will itself having a beginning and an end is unreal. And Will has no meaning when not active; it, being merged in and became one with the Infinite and Absolute Consciousness then, is also called unreal both by Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha (K. IV. 58; YV; VIb. 82. 2, 3, 26, 27).

III. Acosmism (Ajāta-vāda).

Just as *Kalpanā-vāda* paves a way for *māyā-vāda* so does the latter do for ajāta-vāda or acosmism. Acosmism is the doctrine which denies the existence of the world of plurality and change in and before the truly real. It shuns a compromise between real and unreal, being and non-being, perfection and imperfection, logic and life. It is rigorously logical, and pursues logic to its furthest flight, caring little for the consequences and ridicule from the man in the street, for the opinion of whom the Pragmatists care much. For it truth is truth and should not stand in need of respecting the so-called demands of life. Parmenides and Spinoza,

Vasiṣṭha, Gauḍapāda and Śankara have been the greatest acosmistic thinkers of the world.

In philosophy even, Acosmism is the least understood doctrine. It is often talked of only to be criticised and ridiculed, and seldom to be sympathetically understood. Yet Gauḍapāda asserts twice in his *Kārikās* (III. 48; IV. 71) that "It is the highest truth." So also does Vasiṣṭha say that "It is the most victorious doctrine of the Spiritual Science that in reality there is neither ignorance nor illusion but only Brahman resting peaceful in its own glory (YV. VIa. 125-1)."

We have no time here to go through all the arguments which Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha give in favour of Acosmism. We shall therefore be content only to notice a few points in this connection. It is not difficult to grasp the logic of Acosmism only if we raise our vision a little higher than the usual and be strictly logical apart from the consequences. Gauḍapāda names his view *Ajāta-vāda* (non-production) and argues for it thus : "That which is cannot be produced (for it is already there), and that which is not cannot also be produced (for it will be something coming out of nothing which is quite absurd) (K. IV. 5)." "It is inconceivable that the unborn and the immortal which ever exists can ever become mortal (IV. 6)," for as we have seen beginning and end imply unreality and the real is always real. Moreover, change is an illogical conception for it implies the transformation of a thing into something else. But how can anything change into what it is not ? If it is something, it must ever remain what it is. "The real can never become unreal, for the one is and the other is not (K. IV. 79)"

These statements are not mere quibbles; behind them lies a great truth which must not be ignored. The Principle of Identity in formal logic requires in the judgment 'S is P' the presence of some identical X which persists unchanged both in S and P, to make the judgment possible. If we look deep into this problem, we shall discover that from the point of view of X there is neither S nor P for X always subsists as X unchanged in spite of its changes of form from another point of view. This is made clear by Vasiṣṭha through a number of illustrations. Think of a gold ornament, a bracelet or a ring. From our points of view bracelet and ring are realities for they, as bracelet and ring, have a peculiar value for us which mere gold has not. But if we look at them from the point of view of gold as such bracelet and ring have no existence in and for gold. Gold is gold and nothing other than itself. In the same way Brahman ever remains Brahman in itself and never experiences or undergoes change (YV III. 11, 8, 33) Take another illustration. We say that water can be changed into several forms, solid, liquid and gaseous, etc. But if there is anything like water which can equally stand as the subject of all these forms, does it actually undergo any change in any one of those forms ? If it did it will not be water everywhere water, therefore, exists as the immutable X behind all these forms quite untouched by the change. So is the Absolute Reality

untouched by any change of forms that we perceive, no matter if they appear to be real from our point of view; for our limited point of view itself is non-being from the point of view of the Absolute Reality (K. II. 32, YV. III. 42, 4; YV. III. 100.39).

Both Vasiṣṭha and Gauḍapāda severely examine the category of Causality and the analogy of the seed and tree, and show in the interest of Acosmism that both are fictions in relation to the Absolute Reality. The conception of cause and effect, says Vasiṣṭha, can hold true of the forms where one form precedes the other, but that which underlies all forms and so does not proceed or follow anything, for it is present always and everywhere, cannot be related to any form as its cause or effect (YV. VIb. 96, 26; 28; VIb. 53, 17; etc., etc.). Even on the Sāṅkhya conception of causality which means the transformation of something into another. Brahman cannot be said to be the cause of the world—appearance, for, how can that which is transformed into something else be real, and how can that which admits even of partial change be called permanent (K. IV. II; YV. VIa., 49, 2-4, 8, 9).

As regards the 'Seed-and tree' analogy, that too cannot be applicable to Brahman and the world. For, Gauḍapāda says. "the illustration of seed-and tree being itself a part of what requires to be proved cannot be taken as a proving illustration (K. IV. 20). "How can that," argues Vasiṣṭha, "which is so subtle in its nature as to be even beyond mind, be the seed of the gross physical objects having visible forms, etc., etc. (YV. IV. 1, 21, 25, 26, 28, 32, 33)." A seed, moreover, cannot begin to germinate unless there are some external favourable circumstances to help germination, nothing like which is present in the Absolute Brahman (YV. VIb. 54. 21). Again, a seed ceases to be itself and perishes altogether in giving rise to a tree, but Brahman cannot be said to perish like this (YV. IV. 18, 24)." The only way therefore, if any, in which we can relate these forms to the reality is the analogy of dream (YV. VIb. 176, 5, VIb. 195. 44), although in reality they are as unreal as the son of a barren woman (K. III. 28). "They, in fact, neither exist apart from the perception of the particular consciousness of the experiencer, nor involve any change in the being of the reality (YV. III. 5, 6). Like their production the production of the world is false; like their growth the growth of this world is false; like their enjoyment the enjoyment of this world is false; like their destruction the destruction of the world is false (YV. III. 67, 73)."

Both Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha thus conclude that from the highest point of view, i. e., in truth nothing is ever produced and that the truth of philosophy is *Ajāti-vāda* (K. IV. 3) or *Ajātu-vāda* (YV. III. 13, 4) which Vasiṣṭha enunciates thus : "There is nothing like the world in reality, not even in name; Brahman alone is real, and every thing is in reality Brahman (YV. IV. 40, 30; III. 4, 67)." This is the boldest truth ever declared by Philosophy, which will ever assert itself in spite of

the fact that much has been said against it and much can be said against it.

IV. The Method of Self-realisation (Yoga).

Philosophy in India has never been merely an intellectual pursuit: and truth was never meant only to be discovered and appreciated. Philosophy was to be lived and truth to be realised. "Having known the truth within and without;" urges Gauḍapāda, "one should become the truth, should ever rest in it, and should be firm in it (K. II. 38)." Vasiṣṭha divides thinkers into two classes, namely, the wise (jñānl) and those to whom knowledge is a helping friend in the world, (jñāna-vandhu), and prefers the ignorant to the latter (YV. VIb. 21, 1). A wise man according to him is "one who having come to know the truth bring it into practice (YV. VIb. 22. 2)." This is why almost every system of Indian Philosophy devotes a portion of it to Yoga or the method of practical realisation of the truth discovered by the system. Let us now briefly find out the Yoga of Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha.

The truth according to both is the One Absolute Reality without a second by its side, resting in its own blissful essence without the slightest touch of change or multiplicity in it. It is the essence of myself as well as of the universe. This is the ideal before us as long as it is not a living experience with us. To be anything other than that is the bondage and suffering we are experiencing. But what is that which binds and limits us? Both Gauḍapāda and Vasiṣṭha think that it is the *mind* which by its consiring activity creates limitation and bonds for us. It has the power to imagine any thing which it creates by its own power (K. II. 18-29 and YV. III. 91. 16; III. 60, 16). It imagines the world of change and multiplicity, and causes its own bondage and freedom. If the consiring activity of the mind be somehow stopped, the whole trouble will be over (YV. IV, 4, 5). "The whole duality, of whatever form, is simply a creation of the mind, and it is never experienced when mind is naught (K. III. 31)." In the same way Vasiṣṭha says, "Mind is the nave of the wheel of the world-experience, and if it could be stopped from movement the whole trouble would be over (YV. V. 49. 40). If through intelligent effort the consiring activity of the mind is stopped, the world-experience will vanish (YV. V. 50. 7), etc., etc."

Now how to bring the activity of the mind under control and stop it? In answer to this question Gauḍapāda tells us : "When mind ceases from imagining, by a knowledge of the truth of the Ātman, it remains at rest for want of things to cognise (K. III. 32)." Vasiṣṭha deals with the subject very thoroughly and gives us a very detailed scheme of mind control which we can review here in bare outlines only. According to him there are three chief methods of controlling the mind, any one or all of which might be practised. They are : I. *Brahma-bhāvanā*, i. e., imagining oneself to be identical with the Absolute Reality (YV. VIa. 69. 49,

52) with its negative accompaniment of *Abhāvabhāvanā*, i. e., imagining the non-existence of finite things (YV. III. 21, 7); II. *Prāṇa-spandana-nirodha*, i. e., the control of the movement of the vital airs, which is said to be very intimately connected with the movement of the mind (YV. VIa. 78, 15, 16; V. 13, 83); III. *Vasanātyāga*, i. e., giving up all desires, for desire is said to be the motive power of the mind which comes to naught without desire (YV. VIa. 95, 5). There are also other minor methods suggested by *Vasiṣṭha* for the control of mind, a bare mention of which will not be out of place here. They are :— 1. Becoming convinced of the unreality of the mind itself (YV. IV. 11, 27); 2. Giving up imagining activity, i. e., *samkalpa* (V. 13, 20); 3. Having a disregard for the objects of enjoyment (IV. 35, 1); 4. Control of the senses (III. 144, 41); 5. Annihilation of the egoistic tendencies (VIa. 94, 13); 6. Attempt to realise cosmic consciousness (VIa. 128); 7. Practice of disinterestedness (VIB. 28, 23); 8. Realisation of equanimity in all states (V. 13, 21); 9. Giving up the sense of being an agent of actions (III. 95, 35); 10. Mental renunciation of everything (V. 58, 44); 11. Practice of always being merged in the idea of the Self (III. 1. 36); etc., etc.

These details need not confuse an aspirant. All these methods ultimately are only the so many optional, but at the root identical, ways of breaking the limitations that we have gathered around us and consequently have surrounded as with a false, yet hard to crack, shell of individuality, which acts as an obstruction to the flood of Divine Light and Bliss which are ever ours, but from which we have disinherited ourselves by being satisfied with the glow of smaller lights, which, however, we now and then discover, are not sufficient for the craving of our heart and for the satisfaction of our intellect both of which ever yearn for the Infinite.

This is in short what *Gauḍapāda* and *Vasiṣṭha* teach us in common. There is no doubt that much can be said against this kind of philosophy, yet before we stand up to criticise them, it is our duty to understand them sympathetically and honestly, so that we may not in the haste of judging them add to the already existing lot of blunders.

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